

Town Wells Show Slight Traces of MTBE

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Duxbury's drinking water shows an extremely low level of the gasoline additive MTBE — a level that is well under the state and federal standards, said Town Manager Rocco Longo this week.

On April 27 and on two prior dates, the water department tested three town wells for the chemical Methyterary-Butyl Ether, or MTBE, and found the highest level to be 4.2 ppb, or parts-per-billion at one well. Another well had even lower traces and one showed none.

Longo said the federal Environmental Protection

Agency's standard is 70 ppb, and the state's is 35 ppb. When levels are between 10-20 ppb, residents could smell an odor in their water.

Companies began adding MTBE to gasoline in response to the federal Clean Air Act of 1990, and it has seeped into the ground and into groundwater across the nation. It is now banned in some states. So far, MTBE has not been shown to be a carcinogen.

At the Millbrook well on April 24, the water dept. tests found 4.2 ppb. In March, 2.1

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Wednesday, May 17, 2000

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ppb and in Feb., .9 ppb were detected. The April test at the Mayflower St. showed 1.4 ppb; the March test discovered 1.3 ppb and the Feb. test found .9 ppb. The Partridge St. well did not have any MTBE in April or March, but showed .8 ppb in the Feb. test.

These very low levels of

MTBE are from fumes in the air, not ground contamination, said Longo, who has been in touch with a state toxicologist.

Selectmen agreed that a public information session on MTBE with the toxicologist would be helpful.

"We don't have a problem," said Margaret Kearney, selectmen chairman. "But it is a potential hazard that makes me

think we should keep water purity at the top of the list. Every single state and community has to look at this problem."

The water department will continue its monthly tests and the town will begin to develop a plan to deal with MTBE.